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AUTHOR Mayton, Daniel M., II
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ABSTRACT

A random telephone survey of 562 residents of the Pacific Northwest was designed and conducted to determine public sentiment toward the teaching of values within the public schools. The respondents were asked either the open-ended question of whether it was appropriate to teach values within the public school curriculum, or one of two closed-format questions about sets of specific values taken from the Rokeach Value Survey. Schwartz and Bilsky's theories on human values were used to characterize the values on which the public was surveyed. The respondents believed it very appropriate to teach values within the public school curriculum as 69.6% of respondents indicated values definitely should be taught while only 6.5% said definitely not. The results of this survey point to the universalism and benevolent value types as being considered particularly relevant by the public for school curriculums. Support for teaching values of conformity (obedient, self-control, and polite), self-direction (freedom and ambition), and security (family security) was also strongly present. Respondents were either opposed to or equivocal about teaching hedonism, stimulation, or religious values in the schools. The survey shows avoidance of teaching specific values clearly needs reassessment. (CC)

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Values Should Be Taught in the Public Schools!

Daniel M. Mayton II

Lewis-Clark State College

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D. M. Mayton II

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ABSTRACT

This random telephone survey of 562 residents of the Pacific Northwest was designed to determine public sentiment toward the teaching of values within the public schools. The respondents believed it was very appropriate to teach values within the public school curriculum as 69.6% respondents indicated values definitely should be taught, while only 6.5% said definitely not. Results are discussed in terms of the universalism and benevolence value domains of Schwartz and Bilsky with special attention to implications for dealing with the social issues of violence, racism, environmental degradation, and peace.

Values Should Be Taught in the Public Schools!

During much of the recent presidential election campaign, a considerable amount of attention was focused on the issue of values. In particular, support for "traditional family values" was raised as a campaign issue by the Bush-Quayle camp. While this issue was abandoned as a major question in the latter stages of the campaign, apparently because of confusion about what was meant by "traditional family values", this public conversation did elevate the issue of values into the public's attention.

During this past year, many newspaper columns and magazine articles lamented the "decay" of traditional American values and asked what could be done about it. This is a complex issue which psychologists have addressed in the past and should continue to address as it has potential implications for the resolution of a wide range of social issues.

Within this continuing value discussion, some believed that values should be instilled within the privacy of the home while others argued that values education should be part of the public school curricula. This study was designed to determine public sentiment toward the teaching of values within the public schools.

METHOD

Participants

This telephone survey was conducted within a rural community and the surrounding area of about 50,000 residents. Residents

were randomly selected from the telephone directory. A total of 562 responded to one of three surveys during the fall of 1990. The response rate was 65% of the active numbers. There was an 11% refusal rate for those residents contacted.

Instrumentation

Three separate survey protocols were prepared to keep the time demands for respondents as small as possible. Each undergraduate caller administered protocol #1 to their first respondent, protocol #2 to their second respondent, protocol #3 to their third respondent, and cycled back though in the same order for subsequent respondents.

Protocol #1 asked the open ended question "Should values be taught in the public schools?" Respondents were asked to answer by indicating definitely, maybe, or definitely not.

Protocol #2 asked respondents whether or not specific values should be taught in the public schools. The stem "Should the public schools teach students to be" was presented ten times followed by a different <u>instrumental value</u> taken from the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). The ten specific instrumental values included were AMBITIOUS (hard-working, aspiring), BROADMINDED (open minded), FORGIVING (willing to pardon others), HELPFUL (working for the welfare of others), HONEST (sincere, truthful), LOGICAL (consistent, rational), LOYAL (faithful to one's friends, group), OBEDIENT (dutiful, respectful), POLITE (courteous, well-mannered), and SELF-CONTROLLED (restrained,

self-disciplined). Respondents were asked to answer by indicating definitely, maybe, or definitely not.

Protocol #3 asked respondents whether or not an additional ten specific values should be taught in the public schools. The stem "Should the public schools teach students to place a higher value on" was presented ten times followed by a different terminal value taken from the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973). The ten specific terminal values included were AN EXCITING LIFE (stimulating, active), A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT, A WORLD AT PEACE, EQUALITY (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all), FAMILY SECURITY (taking care of loved ones), FREEDOM (independence, free choice), HEALTH (physical & mental well being), PLEASURE (an enjoyable, leisurely life), SALVATION (saved, eternal life), SELF-RESPECT (self-esteem), and WISDOM (a mature understanding of life).

RESULTS

The first survey protocol asked respondents (n=188) to indicate whether they definitely, maybe, or definitely not felt values should be taught in the public schools. A total of 69.6% respondents indicated they definitely should be taught, 23.9% indicated that maybe they should be taught, while only 6.5% said definitely not.

The second and third survey protocols were administered to 191 and 183 individuals, respectively. The percentage breakdown

for each item on protocol #2 and protocol #3 are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Respondents clearly support the importance of teaching the instrumental values listed in protocol #2. Over three fourths of the respondents felt the public schools should definitely teach students to be AMBITIOUS, BROADMINDED, FORGIVING, HELPFUL, HONEST, LOGICAL, LOYAL, OBEDIENT, POLITE, and SELF-CONTROLLED.

Respondents clearly support the importance of teaching the most terminal values listed in protocol #3. Over 80% of the respondents felt the public schools should definitely teach students to place a higher value on A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT, A WORLD AT PEACE, EQUALITY, FAMILY SECURITY, FREEDOM, HEALTH, SELF-RESPECT, and WISDOM. Fewer than 5.5% indicated that the public schools should definitely not teach these values. The respondents were more ambivalent about whether the public schools teach students to place a higher value on AN EXCITING LIFE and PLEASURE. Only about a third of the sample strongly indicated these two values should be taught and a sizable portion of the sample were strongly against them being taught. SALVATION also did not receive strong support. One quarter of the sample indicated salvation definitely should not be taught in the public schools while about half felt strongly the other way.

DISCUSSION

In both an open-ended question and closed-format questions about specific social values the general public within this community believed it was very appropriate to teach values within the public school curriculum. The introduction of systematic values education into the public schools is timely and has support.

Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990) have proposed a theory of a universal psychological content and structure of human values. Their universal structure of values is based on the assumption that values are criteria derived from universal requirements characteristic of the human condition. These include the needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups. Schwartz and Bilskey (1987,1990) have provided considerable cross-national research to validate structural relations among motivational domains of values. These have been modified by Schwartz (1992) and include the value types of power, tradition, hedonism, stimulation, security, conformity, self-direction, benevolence, universalism, and achievement.

The universal value types have been shown to be useful in consolidating previous value research (e.g. Mayton & Furnham, 1991; Mayton, 1992). The results of this study point to the universalism and benevolence value types (Schwartz, 1992) as particularly relevant.

The universalism value type is defined to reflect the

understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. Values which comprise the universalism type include social justice, broadminded, a world at peace, wisdom, unity with nature, protecting the environment, and equality. Community members provided strong approval for teaching all four of the universalism values for which they responded.

The benevolence value type focuses on the preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact. This type includes the values of helpful, forgiving, honest, and loyal. Respondents gave strong approval for public schools to teach all four of these values.

Teachers should give special attention to instilling the values within the universalism and benevolence value types. These values have implications for dealing with many critical social issues facing our society today. Reducing violence in our society, racism, and environmental degradation, are all concerns reflected within the universalism values. Being helpful, forgiving, honest, and loyal provide a cooperative value system to bring about the needed societal changes exhibited within the universalism values.

Universalism and benevolence values received clear support for inclusion into public school curricula. Support for teaching conformity (obedient, self-control, and polite), self-direction (freedom and ambitious), and security (family security) values was also present. Respondents were either opposed to or

equivocal about teaching hedonism, stimulation, or religious values. It is not a case of whether values should be taught in the public schools but which ones should be and which ones should not be taught. The avoidance of teaching specific values clearly needs to be reassessed. This reassessment has implications for the reduction and prevention of violence, racism, and environmental degradation.

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Table 1

	Definitely	Maybe	Definitely Not
Should the public schools teach students to be: (n=191)			
AMBITIOUS (hard-working, aspiring)	85.7%	11.1%	3.2%
BROADMINDED (open minded)	84.7%	11.1%	4.2%
FORGIVING (willing to pardon others)	87.8%	9.0%	3.2%
HELPFUL (working for the welfare of others)	94.7%	4.2%	1.1%
HONEST (sincere, truthful)	93.2%	5.3%	1.6%
LOGICAL (consistent, rational)	90.5%	7.9%	1.6%
LOYAL (faithful to one's friends, group)	82.6%	13.7%	3.7%
OBEDIENT (dutiful, respectful)	77.9%	18.9%	3.2%
POLITE (courteous, well-mannered)	88.4%	9.0%	2.6%
SELF-CONTROLLED (restrained, self-disciplined)	91.5%	6.9%	1.6%
Should the public schools teach students to place a higher value on (n=183)			
AN EXCITING LIFE (stimulating, active)	35.4%	27.0%	37.6
A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT	89.6%	9.8%	0.5%
A WORLD AT PEACE	84.6%	13.2%	2.2%
EQUALITY (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)	91.2%	7.1%	1.6%
FAMILY SECURITY (taking care of loved ones)	82.5%	12.0%	5.5%
FREEDOM (independence, free choice)	85.2%	9.8%	4.9%
HEALTH (physical & mental well being)	85.1%	12.2%	2.8%
PLEASURE (an enjoyable, leisurely life)	36.3%	40.2%	23.5%
SALVATION (saved, eternal life)	52.5%	21.8%	25.7%
SELF-RESPECT (self-esteem)	93.3%	5.0%	1.7%
WISDOM? (a mature understanding of life)	88.1%	9.6%	2.3%

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